

Team Performance Assessment Blog

From PMGT611

by

Troy Stempfley

Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University Worldwide

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Abstract

Past projects have a learning curve that is sometimes realized years later. As you work through a project and recognize conflict you deal with it the best you can at the time. When you gain project experience and knowledge looking back helps you to recognize what could have been done better to improve the process. In the following scenario an inexperienced Project Manager made some critical errors in team building and establishing a workable Work Breakdown Structure. These errors led to conflicts that could have been mitigated and managed much better had those processes been understood.

Overview of Past Project

Prior to retiring from Active duty I was asked to be involved in a project team established to set up the Annual Air Force Ball for Mountain Home AFB. As a Senior NCO I had been involved in several large social event projects prior to this. The Senior Enlisted Advisor for the Wing, who I will refer to as the project sponsor, asked me to be involved in this project because I had worked for him on other projects. He mentioned that the Project Manager was an aspiring younger NCO with no experience but a lot ambition. The team was made up of people enlisted and commissioned officers from different organization across the base. With the Air Force rank culture the PM was starting off from a point of disadvantage but I'd seen these situations work out well depending on the nature of the Project Manager.

The initial meeting seemed to go well, the PM established some ground rules which we later found were inadequate for a team of this size and make up. Most of the ground rules were established by the PM and not by group collaboration. There was little buy in from the team on those rules.

As time went on and progress on a couple of key tasks was not going well conflict rose. Everyone was waiting on one team who was to come up with the theme and logo for the event. There was also a conflict on where the event was to be held. The group responsible for that process was struggling to make a decision because they weren't sure what the décor would be. The two groups claimed the problem was trying to get an answer from senior management as to what they wanted. The PM decided to revert to a tactic of shaming the groups by telling them we were all waiting on them. At the next meeting 5 of 19 people showed up which made the situation even worse.

When I tried to provide some coaching to the PM, he declared he knew his job, everyone else just need to do theirs. I then turned to the Project Sponsor and asked him for help moving the PM along. I presented 2 ideas for the theme and 5 logo ideas. And explained to the sponsor the other conflicts we were having. I also informed him that the PM needed some coaching and wasn't willing to take it from team members. Although I was not part of the team responsible for the logo or theme I had some creative talents and knew time was short and we needed to get the ball rolling.

The next meeting the PM was a little disgruntled that someone had gone over his head. But the momentum had started. With the road blocks of a theme and logo out of the way, it was easier to establish the décor for event and so the venue decision was made. The team then began to work in concert as the PM's tone became more leadership and less directive. The three previous months of haggling vanished into a successful final month of getting everything done.

Which model does the best job of describing how the team evolved? Why?

This team developed in the Punctuated equilibrium style, mostly because there was little management of the team development process and the WBS was not broken into manageable milestones. It may have developed like that way anyhow. "Gersick discovered that new teams do not automatically move through the stages of development, with the increases in performance levels associated with each stage, but instead may follow a different model (the punctuated equilibrium model)." (As cited in Hall, 2007, p427) Jim Hall goes further to claim that if a PM is aware of this situation they can mitigate poor performance by addressing the consequence of that performance on the project.(2007) In short, a more experienced PM may have been able to address these issues before they became critical.

Analyze how effectively the team managed meetings:

Meetings were very much show up and report there was discussion on what needed to be done but all the objectives were discussed each meeting. There was little focus on the current priorities. The PM did most of the talking with only status reports from the smaller groups. This was ineffective at developing a team concept for the group as a whole. And instead of soliciting help from the group on difficult tasks the PM further isolated struggling groups by his inappropriate motivational style.

What did the team do well? What didn't the team do well? If the team were formed again, what specific recommendations would you make about how the team should manage meetings

The team eventually did well at meeting project objective but not in a timely manner. There was a cultural disadvantage by having junior ranking person chairing the team; but the PM made it worse by not using collaboration to establish the ground rules. He could have then simply steered the processes instead of being directive and shutting down team member with greater responsibility than he in their primary jobs.

If the team were forming now and I were in the same situation; I'd attempt to identify to the PM that he had a great team available and we just need to have our inputs into the processes heard and considered. Also, the meetings should focus on the tasks in priority based order chronologically charted by the team.

Lastly the team meetings should have been established with an agenda to prioritize specific milestones. Then those goals would have become the focal point of the group and may not have taken three months to get done. Especially, since I was able to accomplish them in 3 days by myself.

What could the project manager have done to increase team effectiveness?

Two things the PM could have done better during the team development. First have team member participate in developing the ground rule. This obtains buy in and helps to build sense of responsibility to the processes from the beginning. The text states that these ground rules should be part of the team charter; And that the team charter, “should be a collaborative effort on the part of the core team.”(Larson and Gray, 2014, p385)

Then he should have broken down tasks into smaller milestones and hold the group responsible for achieving them. Gauging task progress based on shorter milestones would have identified the need for a collective effort earlier as the miles stone drew near without progress. When the creative processes of developing a logo and theme fell through had they turned the discussion over to the group, others may have been able to present acceptable ideas. Then within the established deadline, the decision on options could have been made and presented to the project sponsor.

Conclusion

Looking at the scenario with a greater understanding of the group dynamic processes it is easy to see where the trouble started. At the time it wasn't so obvious. The need to develop the group synergistic collaboration was critical in the initial team building. Had that taken place many of the conflicts may have been lessened or resolved before they happened. Holding the team to shorter schedules and then getting group consensus on processes that are becoming critical and running short of time can be a vital tool in keeping projects on track.

References

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